

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 MCT-01
/071 W

-----132113Z 110297 /45

R 131435Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3847
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 07939

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, EI
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: HMG VIEWS OF STRIKE
SITUATION

REF: BELFAST 168

SUMMARY - HMG'S ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION
IN NI IS SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME AS THAT REPORTED IN
REFTEL AND PREVIOUS. THE NIO, HOWEVER, DENIES THAT
SECURITY FORCES ARE ASSISTING AT THE BALLYLUMFORD POWER
STATION, AND AFFIRMS THAT OUTPUT IS BEING MAINTAINED.
THOUGH STILL NOT TOTALLY DISCOUNTING THE POSSIBILITY
THAT THE SITUATION COULD DETERIORATE, THE NIO BELIEVES
THE STRIKE IS EFFECTIVELY BROKEN, BUT THAT PAISLEY AND
ASSOCIATES WILL NOT ADMIT DEFEAT BEFORE THE MAY 18 LOCAL
ELECTIONS. THERE SEEMS TO BE VIRTUALLY NO CHANCE,
HOWEVER, THAT PAISLEY WILL LEAVE POLITICS, AND THIS SET-
BACK ON THE GENERAL STRIKE IS UNLIKELY TO REDUCE
SIGNIFICANTLY HIS HARD-CORE FOLLOWING. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF CALLED ON NIO UNDER SECRETARY BOURN MAY 12
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FOR AN UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN NI. THE STRIKE, IN
SHORT, SEEMS TO HAVE FAILED TO DAMAGE THE NI ECONOMY
SERIOUSLY, DESPITE STRONG-ARM TACTICS AND THE CURRENT
SUSPENSION OF BUS SERVICE IN BELFAST. THE NIO BELIEVES
THE GREAT MAJORITY OF ULSTER PEOPLE HAVE DEMONSTRATED
GREAT COURAGE AND FORTITUDE BY STAYING ON THEIR JOBS.
THERE ARE NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NIO'S

APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION AND THAT OF OUR CONGEN (REFTEL AND PREVIOUS), THOUGH BOURN WAS APPARENTLY ABLE TO CLARIFY THE SITUATION AT THE BALLYLUMFORD POWER STATION -- HE DENIED THAT SECURITY FORCES PERSONNEL WERE HELPING MAINTAIN ITS POWER OUTPUT, THOUGH SOME MANUAL WORKERS ARE NOT TURNING UP FOR WORK. POWER LEVELS ARE BEING MAINTAINED. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE SITUATION AT THE POWER STATION IS CONFUSING AND FLUID. APPARENTLY THE WORKERS ARE NOW CONSIDERING STOPPING WORK TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE STRIKE:

2. THE NIO IS ESPECIALLY PLEASED WITH THE WORK OF THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY (RUC) UNDER THE MOST TRYING OF CONDITIONS. IT IS HOPEFUL THE RUC'S FIRM HANDLING OF UNIONIST MILITANTS WILL IMPROVE ITS STANDING WITH THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, WHICH STILL TENDS TO REGARD THE RUC AS A PRO-UNIONIST FORCE. IN THIS REGARD, BOURN SAID THE IRISH GOVERNMENT SEEMED TO BE BECOMING CONVINCED OF THE RUC'S IMPARTIALITY.

3. ALTHOUGH THE NIO RECKONS THAT THE GENERAL STRIKE HAS BEEN REPUDIATED BY THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE NI POPULACE AND IS NO LONGER EFFECTIVE, IT IS STILL CONCERNED THAT AN INCIDENT COULD CREATE A SHIFT IN PREVAILING OPINION. THIS, ADMITTEDLY, SEEMS TO BE A REMOTE POSSIBILITY, BUT IT CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED. ASKED TO IDENTIFY POSSIBLE WEAK LINKS, BOURN SUGGESTED THAT GROWING FATIGUE IN THE RUC COULD BECOME A FACTOR.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 07939

4. ASSUMING OTHER THAN THE WORST CASE, THE NIO BELIEVES THE STRIKE WILL CONTINUE TO WIND DOWN, WITH THE RURAL AREAS BEING THE LAST TO GIVE UP. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT REV. IAN PAISLEY AND HIS LIEUTENANT ERNEST BAIRD WILL ADMIT DEFEAT BEFORE NEXT WEEK'S LOCAL ELECTIONS, EVEN THOUGH MANY OF THEIR ORIGINAL PARAMILITARY SUPPORTERS SEEM TO BE INCREASINGLY DISAFFECTED. PAISLEY, IN PARTICULAR, WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ACKNOWLEDGE DEFEAT BECAUSE OF HIS EARLIER PROMISE TO LEAVE POLITICS IF THE STRIKE FAILED. AT THIS POINT THE NIO DOES NOT EXPECT PAISLEY'S PARTY, THE DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY (DUP), TO SUFFER A MAJOR SETBACK AT THE POLLS NEXT WEEK. THE FAILURE OF THE STRIKE WILL DISCREDIT PAISLEY, BUT THE NIO BELIEVES HIS BASE OF SUPPORT HAD ALREADY BEEN REDUCED TO A RELATIVELY SMALL AND PRIMITIVELY MILITANT PORTION OF THE ELECTORATE. THE STRIKE SETBACK, HOWEVER, WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY END HIS HOPES FOR ANY SIGNIFICANT GAINS IN THE LOCAL ELECTIONS. AND THAT, APPARENTLY, WAS HIS REAL OBJECTIVE.

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5. COMMENT: HMG CLEARLY BELIEVES IT IS OUT OF THE WOODS ON THE STRIKE, AND FROM THIS SIDE OF THE IRISH SEA THAT ASSESSMENT SEEMS CORRECT. ITS EVALUATION OF PAISLEY'S PROSPECTS -- UNFORTUNATELY -- ALSO SEEMS REASONABLE.

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